

VISION OF PUBLIC EDUCATION IN NORTH CAROLINA:

A Great Public Education System For A Great State

October 4, 2012



PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF NORTH CAROLINA

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION | William C. Harrison, Ed.D., *Chairman*

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Dear Friends,

On Oct. 4, 2012 the North Carolina State Board of Education adopted the "Vision of Public Education in North Carolina: A Great Public Education System for a Great State" to guide our work. It is our hope that this vision will encourage a shared commitment to assuring a strong, flexible and coherent education system that serves all students and that is geared toward the promotion of the public interest.

The vision statement and the accompanying 10-page paper is the culmination of work that began at the State Board of Education planning session held in August 2011 in which Board members discussed the need to shift the conversation about public education in North Carolina. Following this meeting, State Board of Education Legislative Director Ann McColl met with superintendents and other members of the state's Regional Educational Service Alliances and hundreds of other education, business and community leaders to gather input.

Also during this time, Edward "Ted" Fiske, former education editor for the New York Times, and Helen "Sunny" Ladd, Edgar Thompson Professor of Public Policy Studies and professor of economics at Duke University's Sanford School of Public Policy, agreed to work with the State Board in developing a paper that would express a vision that was emerging through these sessions.

The development of the vision paper then became an important part of the conversations that followed. On April 3, about 100 superintendents met with Board members in Raleigh to share their challenges, ideals and aspirations for public schools. At the end of April, another group of education and other leaders met at the Friday Institute to continue the conversation about the purpose and importance of public education. Following this meeting, the Board received feedback on the vision paper from members of the Governor's Education Transformation Commission as well as other state and national education and policy experts.

The following two-page summary formally adopted by the State Board of Education and the longer paper written by Fiske and Ladd are a collection of values that support our current work as well as statements that will serve as a solid foundation for the creation of one coherent system of education that benefits all. When we discuss education, we often talk about the need to support the nearly 1.5 million children in our public schools today, but this is not enough. We must use this vision to guide us in taking a collective responsibility for providing every child in the state access to a quality education, whether they attend a private school, home school, charter school or traditional public school.

I hope you will share these documents with educators, administrators, policymakers and others in your community as you continue the conversation about public education and how we can work together to meet the needs of every child in our state.

Sincerely,

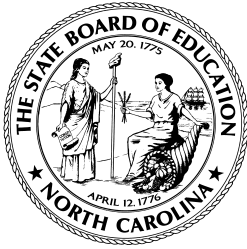
Bill Harrison

NORTH CAROLINA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

William C. Harrison, Ed.D., *Chairman* | bill.harrison@dpi.nc.gov

6302 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, North Carolina 27699-6302 | (919) 807-3441 | Fax (919) 807-3445

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State Board of Education Vision of Public Education in North Carolina: A Great Public Education System for a Great State

Adapted from the report submitted by Edward B. Fiske and Helen F. Ladd

Great states have great public education systems, and great public education systems require great states. A great state boasts a dynamic and diverse economy with economic opportunities for all of its citizens. A great state enjoys a culture of innovation and creativity as well as vibrant arts, its natural resources and other cultural and recreational opportunities. The State Board of Education's vision of a public education system builds on the state's constitutional commitment to education and emphasizes the state's responsibility for assuring a strong and coherent system that serves all students and that is geared toward the promotion of the public interest.

Public education: the foundation for democratic institutions and economic prosperity

A forward-looking vision for education in North Carolina must be grounded in a continued commitment to public education as the foundation of our democratic institutions and the engine of economic growth. Public schools equip students with the knowledge, skills and perspectives they need to engage in reasoned and civil debate of public issues. A strong public school system provides a steady flow of skilled workers, especially in emerging areas such as advanced manufacturing where many employers are struggling to find workers.

Ambitious and evolving educational standards

A great public education system is one that prepares all students for postsecondary education, careers, citizenship and lifelong learning. It sets high standards and fosters the critical thinking and other skills needed in today's global economy. A great state education system must evolve over time in response to changes in the state's economic, technological, and social contexts as well as in response to developments in other states and the world.

Public and individual benefits

The State Board's vision fosters both a spirit of individual freedom and a sense of common purpose. The children who are educated receive the opportunity to maximize their potential and pursue their personal dreams and aspirations. These benefits include the opportunities to attend post-secondary education, enhanced employment opportunities, higher earnings, better mental and physical health, greater political, social and cultural awareness and a higher quality of life. A public education system builds connections between public schools and the civic and social purposes for which they were established and that justify the use of taxpayer dollars to fund them. It provides a structure that allows the various stakeholders – students, teachers, administrators, parents, state and district policymakers, the business community and others, schools and universities – to work together in pursuit of common goals.

The importance of diversity and equal opportunity

A strong public education system in North Carolina promotes the state's civic and economic functions by celebrating the diversity of our population and providing a high quality educational opportunity to all children regardless of their backgrounds or where they live. Public schools are most successful in promoting democratic traditions when they embody important values such as fairness, equity, inclusiveness and respect for diversity of opinion in their own operations. And in many cases, publicly-funded schools are one of the few places in our society where young people have the opportunity to learn, work and play with those whose backgrounds and perspectives differ from their own.

A coherent and flexible system

The State Board's vision encourages diverse and innovative means of delivering education while assuring that each element of the system shares a commitment to the broad purposes of public education, including the maximizing of opportunity for all students. A strong state public education system offers a wide range of content that serves the needs of students with varying academic and career/technical interests, and it offers students and parents the opportunity to make choices among a variety of schooling options with differing missions and educational philosophies.

This vision emphasizes community and cooperation. It provides a mechanism for promising improvements and innovations to be widely distributed. It will require that relevant policymakers and practitioners – both those within the education sector and those in related areas such as family and child services – work together to make strategic decisions about how best to organize the delivery of education in each community to meet the public interest.

Charter schools, Cooperative and Innovative High Schools, the North Carolina Virtual Public Schools and other recent educational innovations can serve as sources of experimentation and innovation and provide quality educational alternatives. These schools have a legitimate claim on taxpayer funds to the extent that they further the overall purposes of the state education system. In practical terms, this means these options must be accessible to all students and held to the same high standards of academic, fiscal and other forms of accountability as traditional public schools.

Because many students move between the private and public sectors, some form of coordination between these sectors is appropriate. If public funds were to be made available – whether in the form of school vouchers for parents or state revenue foregone in the form of tax credits for scholarships – the private and religious schools benefitting from such funds would need to be incorporated far more explicitly into the public school system. That would be necessary because state policymakers have a responsibility to the state's taxpayers to assure that the funds are being used to promote the public interest and not just the interests of the direct beneficiaries.

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A Vision of Public Education in North Carolina

Edward B. Fiske and Helen F. Ladd

1. A great public education system for a great state

Great states have great public education systems, and great public education systems require great states. North Carolina deserves a great public education system.

A great state boasts a dynamic and diverse economy with economic opportunities for all of its citizens. Its population is healthy, well-fed, well-educated and productive. It attracts people and investments from other states and other nations and values its connections to the wider world. A great state enjoys a culture of innovation and creativity as well as vibrant arts, natural resources and other cultural and recreational opportunities. It embraces and takes pride in its diversity along multiple dimensions, including race and ethnicity, political orientation and income.

A great public education system is one that prepares all students for postsecondary education, careers, citizenship and lifelong learning. It sets high standards and fosters the critical thinking and other skills needed in today's global economy. A great education system offers multiple opportunities and options for success – respecting private educational interests and aspirations while promoting the public interest. Through its own operations it models the state's values of inclusion and opportunity.

Without a great public education system, a state will be wasting its most precious resource: its people. Poorly-educated citizens are less healthy, less innovative and creative, less productive, more likely to be incarcerated, and more likely to become financial burdens on their fellow citizens. Without strong public education, a state will lack the foundation of a strong democracy, a vibrant political culture and a flourishing middle class.

Without a great state, it is hard to have a great public education system. Effective public education requires a thriving and growing economy that generates revenues to pay for education. It needs the support of a successful and engaged business community that is strongly committed to the state's economic health and the development of its future workers and customers. A great state maintains a diverse and open political culture that in turn serves as a model for the knowledge, skills and values promoted within the schools. By maintaining a culture of openness and supporting opportunity for all, a great public education system transmits those values to the next generation.

The fortunes of North Carolina and those of its public school system are inextricably intertwined. Our aspirations for North Carolina should be nothing less than to be a great state with a great public education system. To achieve those aspirations, we must focus on the common good and the public interest in education. Only in that way will North Carolina be in a position to support the personal goals and aspirations of all its citizens, both now and in the future.

2. Public education: the foundation for democratic institutions and economic prosperity.

North Carolina has a long and proud tradition of excellence in public education. It became one of the first states to lay the groundwork for public education in the 19th century and boasts one of the strongest legal foundations for public education of any state. Ever since the reconstruction constitution of 1868, the North

Carolina Constitution has recognized education as a fundamental human right alongside others specified in the Declaration of Rights. “The people have a right to the privilege of education,” it declared, “and it is the duty of the State to guard and maintain that right.” The State Constitution mandates a “general and uniform system of free public schools” and charges the state with the responsibility not only to oversee this system but to provide financial support. These provisions remain in force today.

The State Board of Education believes that a strong public education system is the foundation upon which our democratic society and our democratic institutions are built. Schools are the principal means by which the civic traditions and public values first enunciated by the Founding Fathers, including the rights, privileges and obligations of citizenship, are transmitted from one generation to the next and communicated to newcomers in our midst. Public schools equip students with the knowledge, skills and perspectives they need to engage in reasoned and civil debate of public issues. They are most successful in promoting democratic traditions when they embody important values such as fairness, equity, inclusiveness and respect for diversity of opinion in their own operations. And in many cases, publicly-funded schools are one of the few places in our society where young people have the opportunity to learn, work and play with those whose backgrounds and perspectives differ from their own.

The Board also recognizes that, by producing an educated population and workforce, publicly-funded schools function as engines of economic growth and development. The days are long gone when North Carolina could thrive with a low-skill/low-wage economy. Even an industry such as textiles, which has traditionally been viewed as a predominantly low-skill enterprise, now requires workers with sophisticated technological expertise and critical thinking skills.

The North Carolina business community has long understood the central role that a strong public school system plays in providing a steady flow of skilled workers, especially in emerging areas such as advanced manufacturing where many employers are struggling to find workers with the skills they need. The state’s business leaders also recognize the link between quality public schools and future economic investment. At the 2007 Emerging Issues Forum in Raleigh, Bill Amelio, then the chief executive officer of Lenovo, told participants that a key reason that his high-tech firm chose to operate in North Carolina was “the well educated workforce here.”

Business leaders also understand that North Carolina is becoming more diverse in terms of racial, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds and that such diversity is one of the state’s strengths in today’s globally-competitive market. The mix of children in the state’s schools today provides a window into the mix of its future workers and consumers.

3. Public and individual benefits

A central feature of public education is that it generates both private and public benefits. A strong public school system enhances the life chances of individuals while contributing to the health and vitality of the local and statewide communities of which we are all a part.

The children who are educated receive the opportunity to maximize their potential and pursue their personal dreams and aspirations. These benefits include the opportunities to attend postsecondary education, enhanced employment opportunities, higher earnings, better mental and physical health, greater political, social and cultural awareness and a higher quality of life. Education helps individuals to

become fully functioning workers, consumers, citizens and family members. Education, in short, enhances the lives of individuals.

As individuals, we are also members of multiple communities, including neighborhoods and counties, and we share a common identity and destiny as North Carolinians. In our various roles as students, parents, citizens and taxpayers in each of these communities, we all realize collective public benefits from investments in education over and above the sum of the private gains that accrue to us as individuals. Communities with successful public schools enjoy enhanced public safety and greater cultural and leisure activities, which often translate into higher property values. Longer-term public benefits to counties and the state as a whole include a more innovative, dynamic and flexible economy, flourishing research and scientific enterprises, vibrant arts and cultural activities, and the broad citizen participation that undergirds a strong democracy.

A public education system builds connections between public schools and the civic and social purposes for which they were established and that justify the use of taxpayer dollars to fund them. It provides a structure that allows the various stakeholders – students, teachers, administrators, parents, state and district policymakers, the business community and others – to work together in pursuit of common goals.

As in other states, North Carolinians have also turned to public schools to carry out a variety of essential tasks ranging from providing driver education to assimilating immigrants into American society and providing safe and supportive learning environments for children from poor families.

The public and private benefits of education are realized in multiple ways and at different times. Some of these benefits appear immediately, such as the knowledge and skills that children acquire while they are in school. Others take many years to be felt. Economists typically describe education as an investment in “human capital,” parallel to investments in physical capital such as highways. Investments in public education generate benefits that accrue for many years after the initial investment. Failure to address the common good aspects of education today will jeopardize the quality of life for our local communities and the state as a whole both now in the future.

4. The importance of diversity and equal opportunity

A strong public education system in North Carolina promotes the state’s civic and economic functions by celebrating the diversity of our population and providing a high quality educational opportunity to all children regardless of their backgrounds or where they live.

The story of public education in North Carolina over the years is one of growing recognition of the importance of education for the prosperity and well-being of the state and its residents, and of growing commitment to the notion of universal access to education for all its citizens. In the early 19th century North Carolina became the first Southern state to publicly fund education for all white children, and, following the Civil War, schooling was extended to African Americans. Education first became compulsory for all children in North Carolina up to the age of 12 in 1913, and in 1942 the schooling age was raised to 16. This requirement is consistent with the Board’s view that education is critical to the life chances of individuals and to the overall health of a democratic society.

The trends toward inclusiveness and equal opportunity continued during the 20th century with the provision of new educational opportunities for students with special needs, including non-English

speakers. In recent years, educators have become increasingly sensitive to the special challenges that students from impoverished homes often bring with them when they come through the schoolhouse door, such as poor health or the lack of enrichment activities after school or during school vacations. While continuing to push for improvements in teaching and learning, educators have also been working with health, social welfare and other organizations to address the challenges that impede the learning of many disadvantaged children.

Race relations have been a continuing issue in North Carolina education. Even when schools were established to serve black students following the Civil War, public schools remained segregated and far from equal in quality for children of different races until the late 1960s and early 1970s. Re-segregation is a current concern, both between and within schools. While efforts have been made to bridge the gaps, test results confirm that performance gaps between students of different racial backgrounds, low and high wealth communities, and low and high income families remain a persistent problem in the state.

The State Board of Education acknowledges how far the state has come in promoting access to education, but is also acutely aware of how far the state still has to go to achieve the goal of equal opportunity. Much work remains to be done to assure that all North Carolina children – regardless of their heritage, race, ethnicity, income or place of residence – receive the educational foundations they need to flourish fully as productive citizens and to enhance the rich culture of this state and the country.

5. Ambitious and evolving educational standards

Just as education evolved during the 19th and 20th centuries to meet changing circumstances, federal requirements, and public expectations, so must the state continue to update and reinvent the system to meet the new demands of the 21st century. The state education system and the infrastructure required to support it must continue to evolve in order to meet North Carolina's needs for informed citizens and educated workers.

The new global economic order has redefined what today's young people must know and be able to do in order to take their places as participants in a fast-moving and highly interconnected global economy. Significant segments of this emerging global economy demand what are frequently described as "21st century skills" – including high order thinking and problem solving skills and the ability to work in teams. A strong education system in North Carolina sets high standards as defined by traditional academic measures and is forward-looking with regard to 21st century skills.

Today's graduates will also be living and working in an interconnected world where knowledge of other countries and respect for persons from other backgrounds and cultures is the new normal. Solutions to most of the major problems confronting the U.S. and other countries – environmental sustainability, nuclear proliferation, dealing with rogue nations, developing new markets for goods, and many others – transcend the borders of any single nation. As workers and citizens, today's students will be called upon to cast votes and participate in conversations and decision-making that require increasingly sophisticated knowledge and skills, including familiarity with other nations and cultures and the disposition to collaborate even with those whose language, customs and beliefs may differ from their own. Central to this process is familiarity with other languages as a means of understanding how persons from other cultures view the world.

6. A coherent and flexible system

A state education system is more than a collection of students, staff, teachers and administrators going about their appointed tasks, and it is more than a collection of self-sufficient independent schools. It is a “system” – an organic whole with multiple and mutually dependent and interdependent parts interacting and working together over time toward common goals.

To function as an organic whole, a state education system must provide students with a curriculum – or, at a minimum, a developmentally appropriate curricular framework – that builds knowledge and skills in a systematic manner as children progress through schooling and that provides challenging, high level instruction for all students. Such a curriculum must provide continuity to the educational experiences of the many children who move from one school to another from year to year or during an academic year. A coherent and productive education system provides resources for early childhood programs to prepare children for elementary school, funding for a sufficient number of spaces in elementary, middle and high schools, and, as appropriate, provisions for alternative programs and schools for students who might otherwise fall through the cracks. Such a system also prepares students for careers and education beyond high school.

By paying attention to the ways in which key elements interact, an effective system assures that policies and practices such as teacher training programs are designed to support statewide curricular objectives. A system makes possible efficient and effective use of resources and assures that educational opportunities are not adversely affected by factors such as where children happen to live. It provides a mechanism for promising improvements and innovations to be widely distributed.

To say that a state education system must be coherent, however, is not to say that it must be monolithic. The days of the “factory model school” that borrowed assembly line techniques to bring large numbers of students to minimal levels of proficiency in an industrial era are long gone. Educators and policymakers no longer accept the notion that “one size fits all” or even that there is a “single best way” to provide children with the knowledge and skills they will need to take their places in tomorrow’s world.

A strong state public education system offers a wide range of content that serves the needs of students with varying academic and career/technical interests, and it offers students and parents the opportunity to make choices among a variety of schooling options with differing missions and educational philosophies. The most visible of these current options are public charter schools, which receive public funds but enjoy more legislative and operational independence than traditional public schools. Other options include regional schools, Cooperative and Innovative High Schools, as well as the North Carolina Virtual Public School, which is not a school per se but offers students the opportunity to take online courses for credit.

Charter schools, Cooperative and Innovative High Schools, the North Carolina Virtual Public School and other recent educational innovations have increased the educational options available to students and families and have the potential to continue to do likewise in the future. Appropriately authorized and monitored, they can serve as sources of experimentation and innovation and provide quality educational alternatives to disadvantaged students. For such options to play such positive roles, however, it is important that they maintain their status as an integral part of the larger state education system. They have a legitimate claim on taxpayer funds to the extent that they further the overall purposes of the state education system. In practical terms, this means that charter schools, virtual schools and other

new options must be accessible to all students and held to the same high standards of academic, fiscal and other forms of accountability as traditional public schools. To justify state support, they must also embrace the central values of the public school system of which they are a part.

We note that, as recipients of public funding, these and other new schooling opportunities differ in important respects from private and religious schools that do not currently receive public funding. Because their funding comes primarily from private tuition, the private and religious schools have not been subject to the state's accountability program or other requirements that promote access and fair opportunity. Although these schools often foster community service and other democratic values, they are not explicitly part of the larger publicly-funded system of schools. Nevertheless, because many students move between the private and public sectors, some form of coordination between these sectors is appropriate.

As long as such schools receive no public funding, the lack of accountability may continue to be acceptable. If public funds were to be made available – whether in the form of school vouchers for parents or state revenue foregone in the form of tax credits for scholarships – the private and religious schools benefitting from such funds would need to be incorporated far more explicitly into the public school system. That would be necessary because state policymakers have a responsibility to the state's taxpayers to assure that the funds are being used to promote the public interest and not just the interests of the direct beneficiaries. This public interest is especially compelling in the case of elementary and secondary education that is so central to the economic vitality of the state and the health of its democratic institutions.

7. A vision for public education

The State Board of Education's vision of a public education system builds on the state's constitutional commitment to education and emphasizes the state's responsibility for assuring a strong and coherent system that serves all students and that is geared toward the promotion of the public interest.

This vision recognizes that public education involves multiple – and sometimes conflicting – values. Publicly-funded schools operate at the intersection of two sets of legitimate rights: those of parents to direct the upbringing of their children and those of society as a whole to perpetuate democratic values and to promote collective prosperity. Parents have the right – indeed, the obligation – to seek out the best possible education for their children, but they should be free to do so only within a context that permits other parents to do likewise.

The State Board's vision fosters both a spirit of individual freedom and a sense of common purpose. It respects individual choice while promoting equity. The relative importance of these values ebb and flow in different periods, and each generation needs to redefine its own set of values to meet the needs of its time. In this sense, each generation needs to rethink the meaning of a great public education system, and a great state education system must evolve over time in response to changes in the state's economic, technological, and social contexts as well as in response to developments in other states and the world. The one constant, however, is that an education system in a democracy must model and inculcate those values, skills and dispositions that are critical to such a society.

This vision emphasizes community and cooperation. The goal is to promote the public interest by having groups work together toward common goals rather than having them compete with one another in ways that could potentially generate losers as well as winners. Such cooperation might take the form of state policymakers working closely with local school boards and educators when authorizing charter

schools or other educational options so as to assure that both statewide and community-specific interests are furthered. It might take the form of district leaders reaching out to school operators or private firms to help assure that high quality educational opportunities are available to all children. In all cases, it will require that relevant policymakers and practitioners – both those within the education sector and those in related areas such as family and child services – work together to make strategic decisions about how best to organize the delivery of education in each community to meet the public interest.

The Board's vision requires that state policymakers assure adequate resources are available throughout the state so that every child has access to a quality education, including a high quality curriculum and quality teachers, and that no child is denied educational opportunities because of his or her place of residence or family circumstances or background. It requires paying salaries to North Carolina's teachers that are more competitive with other states than they are now, and it will require ongoing investments in early childhood programs and other programs to assure that even children from low-income families enter school ready to learn. And, of course, adequate funding for education in this rapidly changing world cannot be achieved without adequate revenue.

The challenge of raising tax revenue for public education is nothing new to this state, especially at times when the economy has been weak. With some notable exceptions, state policymakers have historically been reluctant to raise taxes for education, and the greatest gains to the education system have come during periods when the state's economy was growing, such as during the 1920's. When the Great Depression seriously threatened the prevailing system of local funding for education at the end of that decade, however, the General Assembly in 1931 took the courageous step of assuming responsibility for funding a free and uniform education for all children in North Carolina. This step paved the way for considerable educational progress in the following years. More recently, in the early 1960s, state policymakers showed similar courage in expanding the state sales tax to fund education. As at that time, the attainment of this part of the vision will require strong leadership and a strong commitment to the public interest.

The Board's public education vision acknowledges that public schools in North Carolina have not always lived up to the ideal of serving all groups of students well, including African Americans, Native Americans and, more recently, the state's rapidly growing Hispanic population. Nevertheless, this vision celebrates the general trend over the last 150 years toward a more inclusive public education system while looking for new ways to realize the collective stake that all North Carolinians have in extending quality education to all of its young people, and especially to those from groups that have been unfairly treated in the past.

A forward-looking vision for education in North Carolina must be grounded in a continued commitment to public education as the foundation of our democratic institutions and the engine of economic growth. Such a vision encourages diverse and innovative means of delivering education while assuring that each element of the system shares a commitment to the broad purposes of public education, including the maximizing of opportunity for all students. It operates schools and other institutions while working with other agencies and nonprofit organizations to meet the educational needs of all the state's children. It seeks to unite various communities around common purposes rather than to divide them through competition and privatization.

8. A call to action.

The stakes are high for the state's current and future children. The knowledge and skills required to function in today's information society are far more demanding than they were in the past, and a high school degree no longer guarantees access to a good job. As educational requirements increase for individuals, the social costs of dropouts also increase. The choice that North Carolina faces is clear: Students either become educated and develop the means to become lifelong learners and productive tax-paying citizens, or they become dependent on the state. Our vision for the future of education in North Carolina must assure a high quality education for all the state's children. We cannot afford to pursue a vision in which some children are destined to be winners and others losers.

Education is an investment in the future of our children and in the future of our state. If we underinvest in education or fail to assure fair access to quality education for all students today, we cannot hope to have the great public education system required for a great state in the future. Great public education systems take years to build, but they can be quickly destroyed. If we underinvest in education today, North Carolina will eventually face the daunting and perhaps impossible task of reinventing a system that has served the state so well in the past.

North Carolina needs and deserves a great public education system. We must expect and strive for nothing less.

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